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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001334

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY MEETS PM GILLANI

Classified By: CDA Peter Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Secretary Negroponte met with newly elected Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gillani on March 26. Gillani expressed appreciation for the President's congratulatory call, asked for the support of the United States, and expressed desire to expand cooperation with the U.S. in counterterrorism efforts and in the economic sector. Gillani discussed his commitment to strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions and recommitted to the war on terror, noting that the new government needed to be taken into confidence about counterterrorism efforts if they were to succeed. Gillani explained that Pakistan's most pressing issue is improving the economy; he also said he looks forward to an improved relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although short on details and plans, Gillani was articulate and humble, appearing genuine in his desire that Benazir Bhutto should have held the Prime Minister post instead of himself. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On March 26, Deputy Secretary Negroponte, SCA Assistant Secretary Boucher, and Charge met with newly elected Prime Minister Gillani in a thirty-minute meeting at the Prime Minister's residence. Gillani immediately expressed his appreciation for President Bush's recent phone call of congratulations and support. Gillani said he and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) accept the recent election results under protest, explaining that the PPP should have had a majority in the National Assembly but were "forced" into a coalition government. Gillani, however, acknowledged that it would have been difficult for his party to work alone when addressing issues such as terrorism and the economy, and noted that PPP's challenge is to effectively connect with the other political parties.

Strengthening Pakistan's Democratic Process

¶3. (C) Gillani told Deputy Secretary that he and his party intend to strengthen the democratic institutions in a slow but smooth process: "We can easily walk, there's no need to jump," Gillani said. Many members of the opposition party privately supported his election, Gillani claimed, but were prevented from publicly demonstrating support in the National Assembly by restrictions on voting against one's own party position. Gillani will take a vote of confidence from the National Assembly on March 29 and then begin forming his cabinet in the following two days. Gillani hopes to strengthen democratic institutions in Pakistan by reasserting the supremacy of the parliament, taking further steps toward

a truly independent Election Commission, and by allowing more freedom in the media.

Recommitted to the War on Terror

¶ 14. (C) Gillani emphasized his desire for expanded counterterrorism cooperation with the United States; he said that the U.S. and Pakistan share a common interest because terrorism is very much an internal problem for Pakistan. He explained that the PPP is committed to fighting terrorism because of Benazir Bhutto's assassination: "I lost my leader because of terrorism," Gillani emphatically said, "I'm sitting in this house because of her sacrifice." Gillani explained that terrorism has a direct impact on his daily life--now he and other PPP leaders can only move about the country in armored cars with security protection. He and his party are committed to diminishing the impression among the Pakistani people that they are fighting another's war; he said that the previous government did not take parliament into confidence about counterterrorism efforts and explained that the PPP intends to convince all of parliament that the war on terror is Pakistan's battle too.

Economy: The Most Pressing Issue

¶ 15. (C) Gillani also expressed his desire for expanded economic cooperation with the United States. Gillani said that Pakistan's most pressing issue is the current economic crisis, particularly electricity shortages and rising food prices. Pakistan's poor, he said, are more concerned about inflation and rising food costs than with strengthening

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Pakistan's democratic institutions. He attributed PPP's victory to public discontent with the economy. Gillani told Deputy Secretary that the new government's first 100 days will focus on the economy, as he is worried about electricity shortages in summer heat. Load shedding, he added, has shut down much of Pakistan's industry, resulting in increased unemployment across the country. Gillani says that all of the political parties share responsibility for this problem and must work together for a solution, but did not provide details on steps he would take in this direction.

¶ 16. (C) Gillani told Deputy Secretary that the moderate parties share an "obsession" with counterterrorism, improving Pakistan's education, creating jobs for young people, and shutting down militant madrasses. Gillani is particularly interested in developing the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), by providing the poor with alternatives to "demigod mullahs." Pakistan has only very rich and very poor, he explained, and he hopes to see a more robust middle class emerge in the country.

Regional Relationships

¶ 17. (C) Gillani said he is confident that relations with Afghanistan will be positive. Afghan President Hamid Karzai called to congratulate him on his election to Prime Minister and extended his full cooperation and an invitation to visit Afghanistan. Gillani then noted that the late Benazir Bhutto, PPP co-chair Asif Zardari, and even Nawaz Sharif all have had an excellent relationship with Karzai. Gillani said that the Awami National Party's (ANP) connections with Karzai are the reason the PPP joined them in North-West Frontier Province (NWFP); he claimed that the PPP had been capable of forming a government on their own in the province.

¶ 18. (C) Indian Prime Minister Singh also called Gillani to congratulate him. Gillani said he has "good friends" in India, particularly in the Indian Home Secretary and National Assembly Speaker; Gillani explained that the Indian Speaker was Minister for Tourism at the same time Gillani held the

post in Pakistan.

¶9. (C) Gillani concluded by requesting the United States' support and cooperation; he was very receptive to meeting with President Bush. He fondly reflected on his visit to the United States, when he lobbied against the Pressler Amendment and had the opportunity to meet multiple congressmen and senators.

¶10. (U) The Deputy Secretary has cleared this message.
BODDE